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Writing Sample

Mirsad Sijarić

Includes "TO DEFEND," "TO LIE DOWN," "TO CONTRIBUTE," "TO BE EAGER TO," "TO FORGET," "TO NOT UNDERSTAND," "TO IMAGINE," "TO RECOGNIZE," "TO PAY," "TO KNOW," "TO POSTPONE," "TO START," "TO BE READY," "TO BE CAREFUL," "TO DISCUSS," "WE CAME BACK TO THE BEGINNING," "LIKE IN THOSE WONDERFUL MOVIES," "FEAR IS A PAINTER," "THE WIZARD IS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL," and "WHILE HE IS WRITING POETRY."

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Mirsad Sijarić

20 POEMS

TO DEFEND

I JOINED UP WITH THE RESISTANCE
IT WAS ABOUT TIME
THE BATTLES HAVE ALREADY BEEN GOING ON FOR A WHILE
AND EVEN THOUGH WE'VE ORGANIZED A DEFENSE
THE ENEMY IS ADVANCING WITH CERTAINTY
THE CITY'S SHRINKING THE OUTSKIRTS ALMOST GONE
THE WALLS OF OUR HOUSES ARE SOLID
THE NEWS REPORT OUR SUCCESS
THE FIGHTERS' MORALE IS HIGH
BUT I DON'T EXACTLY FEEL SAFE HERE
I ASK MYSELF HOW LONG CAN WE HOLD OUT
THINGS ARE GETTING TOUGHER
BANDAGES ARE LOW
FOOD JUST ONCE A DAY
WE TAKE AMMUNITION FROM THE DEAD
BUT WHAT'LL HAPPEN WHEN THEY'RE GONE

Translated from the Bosnian by Ammiel Alcalay

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TO LIE DOWN

I LIE DOWN BEHIND A TREE
ON THE GROUND IN THE GRASS
I SEE THE MOON THROUGH THE CLOUDS
THE CONTOURS OF HOUSES AND TREES
I SEE THE DARKNESS
EXCEPT FOR THE CRICKETS
THE SILENCE IS DULL
SEEMS LIKE THE ENEMY IS TAKING A REST
BUT I COULD SWEAR I HEAR THEM
TWO THREE OF THEM
I WAIT
TERRIFIED
ALONE
THEY MUST BE REAL CLOSE

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO CONTRIBUTE

ARMED AS IF WE WERE HUNTING A FOX
OR LYING IN WAIT FOR A WIDE-EYED GROUSE
WE LAUGH AND OPEN FIRE
AT OUR INVISIBLE ENEMIES
SO WE TOO CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE GENERAL BREAKDOWN
AND INCOMPREHENSIBILITY OF THINGS

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO BE EAGER TO

OUR RESOLUTION INSTILLS CERTAINTY
THERE AREN'T MANY OF US
STILL WE LEFT THE FEAR BEHIND IN OUR VALLEYS
HOME WIFE FAMILY – ABSTRUSE NOTIONS
WE CHECK OUR WEAPONS
TIGHTEN OUR BELTS
WE'RE READY
THAT MEANS
EAGER TO KILL TO BURN TO CRUSH
TO SET OFF ONCE AGAIN
FOR THE FINAL SHOWDOWN

Translated by D. Latinović

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TO FORGET

IN MOMENTS OF CALM
AS I PASS THE SO-CALLED STREETS BY THE SO-CALLED BUILDINGS
OF OUR SO-CALLED CITY
THE SKELETONS OF CIVILIZATION ARISE EVERYWHERE
FURNITURE CLOTHING PHOTOGRAPHS
MARRIAGE PHILOSOPHY
FORGOTTEN
TO EVERY QUESTION FIRE PROVIDES
QUICK AND SIMPLIFIED ANSWERS

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

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TO NOT UNDERSTAND

DON'T CRY
MAMA SAID WE WON'T SLEEP IN THE KITCHEN ANYMORE
THAT WE'LL GO TO SCHOOL TOMORROW
SHE SAID THAT SOON
WHEN THE SNOW MELTS
WE'LL TAKE A BUS
TO THE SEA AND GO SWIMMING
SO BE GOOD
DON'T ASK FOR DADDY
CAUSE THEN SHE'LL CRY
AND KEEP TELLING US
WE'RE STILL TOO YOUNG
TO UNDERSTAND

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO IMAGINE

WE HAVE ALL BEEN STRUCK BY THE DEATH
OF THE POLICEMAN FROM OUR BUILDING
MEN WERE SMOKING IN A CIRCLE
MAMA WAS WHISPERING TO THE NEIGHBOR
HOLDING THE ONLY DOLL I STILL HAVE IN HER ARMS
THE POLICEMAN'S DOG WAS SNIFFING AT A TIN OF SARDINES
AN ELDER GENTLEMAN
WAS TALKING TO HIMSELF
ABOUT HOW THE RUSSIANS AND THE AMERICANS WERE COMING
HOW THERE WAS NO MORE BERLIN
HOW NO ONE WOULD BE SAVED
I GET UP
SPINNING
IMAGINING I AM THE EARTH

*

TO RECOGNIZE

THIS TIME YOU WON'T CHEAT ON ME
WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER TOO LONG
WE'RE IN THE SAME ROOM
IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS
I RECOGNIZE YOUR VOICE
I KNOW YOUR STEPS
AND YOUR BREATH
AS YOU PEEP THROUGH THE CURTAINS
DOWN BELOW
YOU LISTEN TO THE SHOTS AND GIGGLE
NOW
I TURN
I KNOW IT'S YOU
EVEN THOUGH YOU NEVER WERE
THIS TIME YOU WON'T CHEAT ON ME

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO PAY

THEY LEFT THE FIRST MORNING
AFTER NEW YEAR'S
SINCE THEN TEN
TWENTY THIRTY MONTHS
HAVE PASSED
I NO LONGER REMEMBER
I FORGOT THEIR FACES
ALL I REMEMBER IS THE COLD
THEY STILL HAVEN'T CALLED
I ASKED EVERYWHERE
NO ONE'S HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT THEM
THE CONNECTION WAS RISKY AND UNRELIABLE
BUT WE PAID A LOT
WE PAID AS MUCH AS WE HAD TO

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

TO KNOW

I DON'T KNOW
MY PHONE HASN'T RUNG FOR A LONG TIME
AND IT'S DARK IN THE HALLWAY
AFTER SUNSET
I DON'T OPEN THE DOOR FOR ANYONE
THE PEOPLE FROM THE NEXT APARTMENT
LEFT QUIETLY
AS IF THEY HADN'T LIVED LOUDLY
I NEVER LIGHT A FIRE AT NIGHT
I'M AFRAID THEY'LL NOTICE
AND I SIT AT MY TABLE LESS AND LESS AFTER DARK
IT'S TOO QUIET TO THINK OF FOOD
FROM TIME TO TIME I LISTEN TO THE RADIO THAT'S TRUE
BUT ALL I CAN
REALLY TUNE IN TO IS FEAR
AND WHEN THEY SHELL US
I'M CALM
SINCE I KNOW
HE TURNS HIS BACK TO THEM
AND PRAYS FOR MY SOUL

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

TO POSTPONE

A MESSAGE CAME INSTEAD OF HIM
THAT THEY WERE ATTACKED AND HE'LL BE DELAYED A DAY OR TWO
I'M A LITTLE WORRIED
IT'S REALLY TOO BAD I PREPARED A GREAT SOUP
CAKE MADE OF RICE
I GOT A CANDLE
EVERYTHING WAS SET
ALL HE HAD TO DO WAS COME
YOU KNOW
I THOUGHT OF TELLING HIM TONIGHT
THE WAY IT IS
WE'LL HAVE TO POSTPONE EVERYTHING

*

TO START

I ASK MYSELF JUST HOW MUCH CAN I BELIEVE HIM
HE'S GONE FOR DAYS
THEN BURSTS IN AFTER DARK
WASHES UP AND EATS
SLEEPS THE WHOLE DAY
AND WHEN I ASK HIM SOMETHING - HE FROWNS
OF COURSE HE BRINGS CANS OF FOOD AND CIGARETTES
SOMETIMES EVEN BREAD BUT
WHETHER IT'S A FEELING OF GUILT OR COMPASSION
I DON'T KNOW
HE ACTS STRANGE
I'M STARTING TO DOUBT

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO BE READY

HE SAYS:
PUT YOUR COAT ON
GET THE LAUNDRY READY FOOD AND THE GOLD
DON'T TOUCH THE PAINTINGS
WE'LL ONLY TAKE WHAT WE NEED
I'LL BE AT THE DOOR
AND THE CIGARETTES ARE WITH ME
IF THEY BURST INTO THE BUILDING TONIGHT
PLEASE
BE QUIET AND BE READY
BE WITH ME

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO BE CAREFUL

WE BRACE UP A HOLLOW WALL WITH BOOKS
 THE NEIGHBOR DADDY AND ME
 WE PULL THE BLINDS DOWN ON THE WINDOWS
 BARRICADE THE DOOR WITH A DRESSER
 IT'S QUIET TONIGHT BUT
 WE GET THE WATER CANNISTERS READY
 PUT THE BANDAGES WHERE WE CAN REACH THEM
 WE'VE GOT OUR SHOES ON
 THE CARTRIDGE IS IN THE BARREL
 IT'S QUIET TONIGHT BUT EVEN SO

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

TO DISCUSS

WE ARE SITTING ON THE BALCONY IN THE DARK AND DISCUSSING
 THE MEANING OF ART EXISTANCE IN PEACE
 THE PROSAIC NATURE OF THIS PHENOMENON ANGERS AND STIRS US
 THE ARHYTHMIC POEM OF WAR IS ALWAYS LOUDER
 WE WITHDRAW INTO THE APARTMENT
 CARRYING OUR CHAIRS WITH US
 THE DISCUSSION STOPS
 SOMEONE CRACKS A JOKE

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

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WE CAME BACK TO THE BEGINNING

WE CAME BACK TO THE BEGINNING
 AND WE KNOW IT'LL BE HARD
 TO START ALL OVER AGAIN
 WE'LL HAVE TO REDISCOVER FEAR AND CONFUSION
 THE ADVANTAGES OF FIRE AND STONE
 MAKE POTS KNIVES AND CUSTOMS
 EAT BLOODY MEAT
 AND SWEAT IN SKINS AS WE HUDDLE BY THE FIRE AT NIGHT
 LISTEN TO THE WILD AND UNRELIABLE GODS
 AS THEY DISAPPEAR INTO THE UNDERBRUSH AT THE SOUND OF HOOVES
 TIME WILL PASS
 AND WE'LL REMEMBER THE HEARDS OF HORSES
 THE BATTLING DOGS
 OUR WOMEN WILL WEAR WHITE GARMENTS
 AND THEY'LL HAVE LONG FINELY COMBED HAIR
 WE'LL WRITE AND READ BOOKS
 WE'LL DISCUSS TRUTH AGAIN

DEAL IN WOOL AND SPICES
 EXPERIMENT WITH MERCURY
 WE'LL BELIEVE
 WE'LL BE HUMAN
 NOTHING WILL BE ALIEN TO US
 THE GARDENS OF OUR HOUSES
 WILL BE A PLEASANT SIGHT TO EVERY EYE
 BUT
 TIME WILL PASS AGAIN
 AND THE SORROWFUL FACES WITH DULL GAZES RETURN
 GRAY STREETS DESSICATED FLOWERS
 THEN WAR SONGS WILL BE HEARD
 THE UNBRIDLED CLATTER OF SHOTS RATTLING AT DUSK
 AND ONCE MORE CITIES WILL TURN TO DUST
 WE'VE COME BACK TO THE BEGINNING
 IN OUR BEGINNING IS OUR END
 WE'RE AWARE OF ALL THAT HAS PASSED
 AND WE KNOW OF EVERYTHING THAT WILL BE
 THE HORROR MAKES US WISER AND MORE SILENT
 WE RAISE OUR HANDS TO THE SKY
 AND AUGUR WITH ALL OUR HEART
 THAT THE CIRCLE WILL FINALLY BE BROKEN

Translated by Ammiel Alcalay

*

LIKE IN THOSE WONDERFUL MOVIES

SEVEN MONTHS PREGNANT
 SUDDENLY
 HER HANDS RED AS EARTH
 ACQUIRED SUPERHUMAN POWER
 LIKE IN THOSE WONDERFUL MOVIES
 UNDER THE PRESSURE OF HER FINGERS
 POTS WERE TURNING HANDLE – LESS
 SPOONS DISTORTED LIKE TUNELESS WOMEN BAR SINGERS
 AND KNIVES MADE OF BEST
 METAL AND ALLOY
 WERE SIMPLY MELTING AS TALLOW – CANDLES
 WORKING IN THE RESTAURANT KITCHEN
 OF THE CITY BAKERY
 SHE DID MORE DAMAGE THAN WAS OF USE
 STILL SHE DISTURBED NOBODY
 HEAVY THOUGH WITH HER LIVING SWELLING
 THAT WOMAN SMILING
 FLEW AS A BIRD

HUMAN AND OBJECT
 CONDITION AND FORM SHE WAS CHANGING
 ONLY THE TOOTHLESS PLASTIC PLATES
 STAYED THE SAME
 PRESUMPTUOUS
 AS IF CHEMISTRY
 WAS THE SOLE TRUE SCIENCE

Translated by Dunja Latinović

*

FEAR IS A PAINTER

FEAR IS A PAINTER
 PAINTING FACES PALE
 PENETRATING YOU AND ME EQUALLY
 IT DREW WAVES ONTO ROCKS
 BROUGHT BARBARIANS TO ROME
 CORRODED THE SHIP HULL CUT ANCHORS' CHAINS
 FEAR RESTS IN THE HAREM OF FRIEDRICH II HOENSTAUFF
 LURKING BEHIND THE VEILS
 IT THREW SILK INTO THE FIRE
 FEAR IS IN THE DARK
 STABBING THE OX IN THE STALL RAM IN THE PEN
 SNEAKING AROUND TENT
 AWAKEING THE SHEPHERD IT MAKES THE DOG HARKEN
 FEAR LIFTS A WOMAN'S SKIRT
 TO LOVERS IT BRINGS DOUBT
 CHILDREN'S TOYS IT BREAKS
 FEAR IS A WAITER AT THE PROM NIGHT
 POURING SHAMELESS BLOOD INTO WINE
 MAKING DANCERS TRIP
 IT BREAKS THE RECORD PLAYER
 TURNS BITTERS THE BLUE SMOKE OF HASHISH
 CALLING FOR THE GHOSTS
 AT MIDNIGHT IT HANGS MASKS ON THE CEILING
 AND STOMPS IN THE ATTIC
 FEAR AT THE TABLE IN THE ARMCHAIR
 SMOKING YOUR CIGARETTES READING KAFKA
 FEAR TREATING ROOTS AT THE DENTIST'S
 REMOVING TARTAR
 IT DRIES THE INK OUT OF A PEN
 IT SCATTERS PAPER
 BRINGS WORK TO RUIN
 FEAR SPRAWLED ON A COFFIN SMILING
 SETS MINES IN THE FIELDS
 CROPS ON FIRE

FEAR IN THE COFFEE IN THE ASHTRAY IN THE ASHES
 SWAYING THE BUS AROUND BLOCKS THE DRIVER'S VIEW
 INCITES DISORDER
 IT DRIVES SMELTERS TO STRIKE
 FEAR IS A DEMAGOGUE
 INSIDE THE BOOKS INSIDE THE GOD INSIDE THE DEVIL
 FEAR IS FAITH
 WRITTEN DRAWN PAINTED INVENTED
 FEAR THE BLACKNESS OF A CROW
 FEAR THE SHIVER OF THE BLACKNESS OF A CROW
 DISAPPEARED IN THE AIR SHATTERING

Translated by Dunja Latinović

*

THE WIZARD IS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL

DUE TO A STRANGE DESIGN
 IN CHILDHOOD ALREADY
 THE WIZARD WAS DETERMINED
 HIS FORMAL EDUCATION WAS LONG AND HARD
 CONTRARY TO THE GENERAL OPINION
 ABOUT THIS SORT OF PEOPLE
 HE STUDIED MATHEMATICS
 SOCIOLOGY PSYCHOLOGY AND LOGIC
 MAGIC WORDS
 CAME ONLY IN THE END

BEFORE IT IS TIME
 NO ONE MUST SEE THE WIZARD
 HE WORKS SURROUNDED BY A TALL WALL
 SURROUNDED BY THE SUBORDINATED AND THE APPROVED
 THE WORK IS GRIEVOUS AND HARD
 A HUGE NUMBER OF PETRIFIED
 TRANSFORMED SLEEPING DEAF AND MUTE
 WHO ARE WAITING TO BE TREATED

HE IS DEDICATED
 WORKING LONGER THAN NEEDED
 WHEN HE GOES HOME
 HE WEARS HIS CITIZEN SUIT
 ALWAYS SHAVED
 NEVER WEARING A HAT
 NO ONE MUST RECOGNIZE THE WIZARD

THE WIZARD IS IN FACT AN ARCHEOLOGIST

DIGGING BELOW THE SURFACE
SEARCHING FOR THE TRUE MEANING OF THINGS

Translated by Dunja Latinović

*

WHILE HE IS WRITING POETRY

LOKI THE GOD OF MISCHIEF AND EVIL
WITH SHINY AND TWISTED HORNS
IS COMFORTABLY SPRAWLED IN A LEATHER ARMCHAIR
SMOKING AND SKIMMING THE DAILY PAPER
LOOKING FOR EXAMPLES FOR HISTORY OF HUMAN PATIENCE
WORTHY OF RESPECT
FOR CENTURIES NOW IN HIS ROBE AND SLIPPERS
THE GOD OF FIRE WITH HIS HOSTILITY
TO LIGHT
IS BLOWING SMOKE SMILING
AND WAITING FOR THE RIGHT MOMENT
THE MODERN TIMES EXALTED
APPRECIATED
FOLLOWED ADMIRER
EXAMPLES OF HIS WORK
WHEREAS LOKI HAS NOT BEEN THAT PROUD AND ARROGANT
SINCE THE DAY HE RECEIVED THE FLATTERING TITLE
OF FATHER OF WORLD EVIL

THE NUMBER OF THE RECRUITED TO THE RIGHT SIDE
IS GETTING CLOSE TO THE IDEAL MEASURE
LOKI IS EMPTYING HIS PIPE
ODIN IS WRITING POETRY
THE WORLD WILL FALL

Translated by Dunja Latinović
